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SUBJECT: EASTERN DRC NOTES - FEBRUARY 2

¶1. (U) The items contained in this report consist principally of spot information from various sources. This report is not exhaustive, nor can all the information contained therein be confirmed at this time.

Summary -----

¶2. (SBU) During a February 1 press conference, President Kabila defended his decision to allow Rwandan troops to enter the DRC to pursue the FDLR. According to Kabila, RDF troops would leave the DRC by the end of February. Kabila also defended the GDRC's cooperation with CNDP renegade Bosco Ntaganda, against whom the ICC has an arrest warrant, emphasizing peace and security in the Kivus was more urgent than international justice concerns. The lack of military engagement with the FDLR has led some MONUC contacts to assume that the joint operations are concentrating on psychological operations, apparently with success: 214 Rwandan rebels have recently surrendered to UNHCR and DDRRR reports that it successfully repatriated 47 combatants and their dependents on February 1. The security and humanitarian situation in Orientale Province remains very precarious, with residents in Dungu and Doruma towns fearing renewed attacks by the LRA. In response to these fears, a very thin MONUC presence, and increasing FARDC exactions, residents are forming self-defense militias. SRSG Alan Doss acknowledged that MONUC could not carry out its protection mandate adequately in Orientale Province until additional troops, authorized by the UNSC, arrive in the DRC. End Summary.

LRA: Operation Lightning Thunder -----

¶3. (SBU) MONUC continues to play a very limited role in Operation Thunder. SRSG Doss stated that MONUC cannot adequately perform its protection mandate in Orientale Province until it receives the additional 3,000 troops, which the UNSC has authorized. UN contacts in Goma and Kinshasa have voiced concerns to Emboffs that the LRA may try to request support from traditional sources in the Government of Sudan.

¶4. (SBU) USAID/DART Deputy Team Leader, who recently visited the area as part of an assessment team, reported that, although Dungu remained calm, residents fear LRA attacks, as well as FARDC looting. There have been reports of FARDC soldiers perpetrating rapes and extortion in Dungu. FARDC troops reportedly also levy informal "taxes" on individuals entering the town, threatening those who are unable to pay.

¶5. (SBU) Dungu residents expressed a lack of confidence in the abilities of MONUC, the FARDC, or the UPDF to adequately protect the population. MONUC forces are based 13 kilometers outside of Dungu, entering the town only when escorting UN staff. Accordingly, self-defense militias have been formed, with more weapons on the

street.

¶16. (SBU) Further north in Doruma, the security situation remains very precarious due to continued LRA attacks in the vicinity. Less than 50 FARDC troops and approximately five UPDF soldiers are stationed in Doruma, with no MONUC presence. IDPs in the area told USAID/DART Deputy Team Leader that Doruma is a likely LRA target because of insufficient military protection and the town's geographic vulnerability.

Operation Lightning Thunder-Humanitarian Issues

¶17. (SBU) According to Caritas, 10,370 IDP households, or approximately 51,850 people, reside in and around Dungu, far below previous OCHA estimates. Only Solidarites and Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) operate in Dungu. Caritas and UNHCR's local NGO partner, ADSSE deliver assistance to outlying villages and conduct field assessments.

¶18. (SBU) As of January 29, 17,050 IDPs reside in Doruma and within a 20-kilometer radius, according to local authorities. The assessment team received reports of high numbers of IDPs in the isolated villages of Bangadi, Nbilima, Nanzali, and Ndedu near Dungu; and in the villages of Naparka and Gangala in near Doruma.

¶19. (SBU) Food insecurity remains a concern for villages attacked and at-risk of attack by the LRA due to restricted access to agricultural fields and the depletion of food stocks by the rebels.

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However, food assistance remains a lower-priority need in Dungu, Doruma, and in villages that the LRA has not attacked. Non-food items, particularly in Doruma, are urgently needed.

DRC-Rwandan Joint Operations

¶110. (SBU) MONUC reports that RDF troops have not moved since January 26. The RDF has positioned itself along three axes in the Petit Nord area of North Kivu, apparently reinforcing logistical supply lines and waiting for FARDC/CNDP forces to deploy alongside. There have been few clashes with the FDLR, leading some MONUC officials to speculate that, currently, the joint operations are primarily psychological operations in nature. This approach may have already paid dividends: 214 FDLR troops have surrendered to UNHCR, while MONUC reported that other FDLR elements had even abandoned control of certain mining sites.

¶111. (SBU) MONUC has investigated several allegations of FDLR kidnappings/atrocities against the local population; in all cases abducted civilians were subsequently released or the reports appeared to be groundless. Nevertheless, MONUC continues to deploy forces to areas in North and South Kivu where the civilian population could be vulnerable to FDLR reprisals. A senior MONUC commander told Goma PolOff privately that MONUC's protection mandate was "unmanageable." Priority areas include Kanyabayonga, Walikale, and Masisi. Second tier priority areas are Pinga and Nyamilima.

¶112. (SBU) According to MONUC contacts, the Joint Operations Center, set up to coordinate MONUC, FARDC, and RDF planning, is basically non-functional. MONUC will therefore limit its operational support to logistical assistance, which currently encompasses only CNDP integration into the FARDC. Integration centers have been established at Rumangabo, Kimoka and Mumbambiro (for PARECO), but MONUC confided that the CNDP response has been "underwhelming."

¶113. (SBU) In a February 1 press communiqu, MONUC stated that it would not participate in any operations in which Bosco Ntaganda also participated. According to one MONUC source, Bosco "was not welcome in Goma or Gisenyi." (Note: MONUC has, however, stressed, that it has no mandate to arrest Bosco. End Note.) Bosco, who was recently named the Deputy Commander for the joint operations, reportedly spends considerable time in Goma. Deputy SRSR Ross Mountain

cautioned that, although the UN would be embarrassed to collaborate with Bosco, "where peace and justice conflict, we will choose peace."

Kabila on Rwandan Presence and Cooperation with Bosco

¶14. (SBU) During a February 1 press conference (septel), President Kabila characterized FDLR presence in the DRC as the root cause of instability, justifying the joint FARDC-RDF operations. Kabila said the operations should end by February 10, allowing Rwandan troops to return to Rwanda by the end of February, as well as Ugandan forces fighting the LRA. (Note and Comment: some wire services reported Kabila stated Ugandan forces would leave by February 15, but Digital Congo-close to the GDRC-and other media report an end of February deadline. Kabila is under enormous political pressure to limit the duration of the RDF operations in the Kivus. Post suspects that these "deadlines" may be fungible, depending on the situation on the ground. End Comment.)

¶15. (SBU) Regarding GDRC cooperation with the ICC-indicted Bosco, Kabila said that if it is a question between international justice, which would probably not be expedient, and peace and security for the population of Eastern DRC now, "the choice was clear." Kabila noted that the GDRC's cooperation with the ICC had been exemplary.

The Quiet Success of DDRRR

¶16. (SBU) According to Bruno Donnat, Head of MONUC's DDRRR program, approximately 200 Rwandan combatants in Eastern DRC voluntarily repatriated to Rwanda during the month of January, compared to 70 in January 2008. During a Saturday press conference, Donnat stressed that, despite the on-going military operations against the FDLR, DDRRR would continue its activities.

¶17. (SBU) On February 1, DDRRR repatriated 13 combatants and 34 of their dependents near Bukavu. The group reportedly reached the Bunyakiri transit camp after walking two days through the Numbi

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Forest and the Haut Plateau.

GARVELINK